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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: BIYA ADDRESSES THE NATION ABOUT BAKASSI

REF: YAOUNDE 817

¶1. (U) On August 21, Cameroonian President Paul Biya gave a televised speech to the nation that dealt exclusively with Nigeria's August 14 final handover of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon (reftel). Biya congratulated the people of Cameroon for their "moderation and patience" in pursuing a peaceful resolution to the long-running border dispute and he expressed gratitude to the people and Government of Nigeria, who "honored their commitments" and allowed "reason and the law to prevail."

¶2. (U) Biya acknowledged the role of the United States, France, Germany and the UK (in that order) as witness states, and the role of the United Nations as the broker of the Greentree Agreement. Biya hailed the Greentree Agreement as an model, predicting it will become a precedent for peaceful resolution of border disputes around the continent. In closing, Biya heralded the "dawn of a new era in relations between Cameroon and Nigeria."

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Biya rarely addresses the nation and his decision to comment publicly about Bakassi one week after the handover was a positive development which highlights the importance of the issue to Cameroonians and should help further strengthen the GRC's relations with Nigeria. The U.S. relationship with Cameroon may also benefit from the events of the past week. In an earlier August 21 conversation with Poloff, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Justice Amadou Ali, who was the Government of Cameroon's point man for the Greentree Agreement, said the GRC believes that USG pressure on Nigeria was the deciding factor in the success of the Greentree Agreement. When Poloff demurred, crediting instead the GRC and GON leadership for their dedication to the process, Ali insisted: "You may think it was us, but we are convinced it was you."

FOX